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ABSTRACT

Community college department chairs are central players in realizing the mission of the community colleges. They can identify the central elements and practices of good teaching and create a climate to foster good teaching by focusing on active learning strategies, cooperative learning, and diverse learning styles in students. By identifying the elements in changing faculty teaching, chairs can help to facilitate positive developments in teaching and learning. Chairs should encourage student-faculty contact. active learning, cooperation among students and faculty, quality time spent on tasks, prompt feedback for work, high expectations for student performance, and diverse methods for learning and teaching. Chairs should also assist in faculty development by: (1) encouraging faculty to adopt the goal of developing students' intellectual skills and the skill of learning; (2) making time during department/division meetings for specific faculty members to share examples of activities that have worked well to stimulate student learning; (3) reviewing the goals and objectives of a selection of courses during department meetings or faculty development days; (4) devoting part of a meeting to a case study focusing on a teaching problem; and (5) setting up a small grants process for faculty. This emphasis on teaching and learning can be expanded beyond the individual department or division to the college as a whole through faculty development days focusing on such topics as writing across the curriculum, critical thinking, or collaborative learning. While some financial incentives are needed to create better teaching and learning, the innate reward in this activity is high. (MAB)

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The Role of the Chair in Fostering Teaching and Learning

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Introduction

Community college chairs are central players in bringing the teaching mission of community colleges to its realization. They can identify the central elements and practices in good teaching and create a climate to foster good teaching. Focusing on active learning strategies, cooperative learning, and diverse learning styles in students constitutes a solid core of good practices for teaching and learning. By identifying the elements in changing faculty teaching, chairs can help to facilitate positive developments in teaching and learning. Concrete activities and options already exist for chairs to explore and adapt to their academic setting.

The Centrality of Teaching and Learning in the Community Colleges

The mission of the community colleges is clearly focused on teaching and learning. Regardless of the proportion of teaching in general, liberal arts transfer courses, in occupational-technical courses, or in developmental courses, teaching students is at the core of community college life. Community colleges are those institutions where the practice of teaching and learning is not diminished by research or community service concerns. As such, the clarity of faculty as teachers and coaches of student learning is not in conflict with the role of faculty as researchers and theoreticians in academic disciplines.

Community college faculty need to be current in their disciplines and subject matter areas. This is, however, a means to an end--the end of student learning. If there is a logical area for faculty research in community colleges, it is the area of research and scholarship about teaching and learning, about what succeeds and what doesn't.

In a recent interview on National Public Radio, Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, was asked to characterize great teachers of his. He responded:

> **"Great teachers of mine have had three characteristics. First, they know their subject matter. Secondly, they know a variety of techniques; they know how to teach. Finally, they are authentic, *real* people. This characteristic comes through in their teaching."**

Boyer's quotation is helpful in understanding teaching and how to foster it. Institutional attempts to foster "a variety of techniques" and improve "how to teach" should be the centerpiece. While recognizing the obvious importance of knowing the subject matter and of being authentic, real people, these are <u>not</u> the domain of the chair's attempt to foster teaching and learning.

In trying to analyze the elements of how to teach and appropriate techniques, the "Seven Principles for good practice in Undergraduate Education" is helpful. This document from the American Association for Higher Education (Chickering, 1988) identifies the following seven principles as pivotal:

- **Student-faculty contact**
- **Active learning**
- **Cooperation among students, among faculty**
- **Time on task**
- **Prompt feedback**
- **High expectations**
- **Diverse ways of learning and teaching**

Contact between student and faculty entails more than physical proximity. Students thrive when they have an identity within a college. When faculty know the names of their students and understand who are in the classrooms, a sense of belongingness takes place. This is a pre-condition for community. When communities have members who know each other, accountability occurs. Faculty and students become a community of learners. Membership in a community of learners is one of the best vehicles of retention.

Active learning strategies involve students as actors, not passive recipients. Through writing and speaking, students give evidence of their learning. Faculty adept at the craft of teaching create strategies that involve students to maximize learning. Active learning strategies from Writing Across the Curriculum and Computing in Instruction to Critical Thinking and Classroom Assessment need to be developed.

Cooperation among students can be developed both inside and outside the classroom. Collaborative learning in the classroom is a major thrust of active learning strategies. Small-group work, well-conceived and structured, can achieve cooperation in the classroom. Cooperation in the campus at large embodies the meaning of community colleges where belongingness and involvement characterize student interaction.

Cooperation among faculty can be a special aspect of the community colleges. This is because a faculty culture can exist where faculty learn how to teach from each other. Because the community college mission is so centered on teaching, the chairs have a structural opportunity beyond that of other sectors of higher education. In addition, the history and demographics of America's community colleges have created a mature faculty, now in the most productive years of their careers, and ready to learn from each other.

Time on task is crucial for both faculty and students. Students must invest time, both in and out of class, to learn. Faculty commitment to students can be closely linked to the time devoted to students directly, as well as to preparation and evaluation of student work.

Prompt feedback to students keeps them involved in the learning process by giving them the knowledge of the results of their efforts. Similarly, faculty, through classroom assessment, can gain feedback on how students perceive the learning process. This helps the student-centeredness of teaching.

High expectations are central to quality outcomes. Students must be held accountable to the standards of *college-level* learning. These expectations should be clearly conveyed by the teaching faculty--both in terms of intellectual skills and subject matter mastery.

Finally, a diversity of talent should be manifest in the ways of learning and teaching. The spectrum of society's ethnic and racial diversity should be represented in the faculty. The faculty's diversity should also extend to an appreciation of different learning styles and backgrounds of students.

With these seven principles as a foundation for fostering teaching and learning, let us focus on the classroom interaction between students and faculty. While all seven principles are important, three principles are more central than the rest in the dynamics of classroom teaching. These three principles are as follows:

- **Active learning**
- **Cooperation among students, among faculty**
- **Diverse ways of learning and teaching**

Focusing on Developing Teaching and Learning

Active learning, cooperative learning, and diverse learning styles constitute the core of good practice for faculty in their teaching. To assist in deepening the understanding of these elements in relationship to subject matter knowledge, let us consider Mortimer J. Adler's (1984) model on the multiple dimensions of learning from The Paideia Program.

Mortimer J. Adler's Model

The Multiple Dimensions of Learning

	COLUMN 1	COLUMN 2	COLUMN 3
Goals	Acquisition of organized knowledge	Development of intellectual skills, skills of learning	Enlarged understanding of ideas and values
	by means of	*by means of*	*by means of*
Means	Didactic instruction, lectures and responses, textbooks, and other aids	Coaching, exercises, and supervised practice	Maieutic or Socratic questioning and active participation
	in three areas of subject matter	*in the operations of*	*in the*
Areas, operations, and activities	Language, literature, and the fine arts Mathematics and natural sciences History, geography, and social studies	Reading, writing, speaking, and listening Calculating, problem solving, observing, measuring, estimating Exercising critical judgment	Discussion of books (not textbooks) and other works of art and involvement in artistic activities, for example, music, drama, and visual arts

Note: The three columns do not correspond to separate courses, nor is one kind of teaching and learning necessarily confined to any one class.

The Paideia Program

For the purpose of community college chairs developing strategies to foster teaching and learning, let me use Adler's diagram by suggesting that the chair's role is to develop faculty capability in these three dimensions.

Elements in Changing One's Teaching

To develop faculty and their ability to teach and promote all three dimensions of learning, it is essential to identify the process needed for the faculty member's evolution. Here is a model with four elements in that process:

- **Gather information from one's own reflection and input from others on instructional strategies, techniques, and practices. This involves gaining an understanding of what one does, how it effects students, what the options are, and what assumptions underlie the options and one's own behavior.**
- **Faculty identify areas that need to be changed in their own behavior. Specific strategies, techniques, practices, and activities need identification in terms of what one is leaving behind and what one is about to attempt. Only the individual can determine what best fits their own disposition and style.**
- **Faculty members implement the changes at a comfortable pace. Determinations need to be made about how much to attempt--how many courses to alter, how many new strategies to try.**
- **Finally, the faculty assess the impact of the new teaching strategies, techniques, practices, and activities.**

Classroom assessment of these efforts needs to occur.

While these four steps constitute a process for faculty improvement of instruction and for individual faculty to utilize, the community college chair needs to create the climate in which faculty can develop through this process.

The main way that chairs can do this is to devote time, energy, and resources to allowing faculty the opportunity to reflect on their own instructional strategies and identify what and how to change teaching strategies. These opportunities work best when there is choice among individual and group options.

Guidelines for the Chair

Here are some options that community college chairs could use to facilitate faculty development in teaching and learning.

- **Efforts that focus on intellectual skills development tend to link most directly to the quality improvement of community college teaching. According to Adler's diagram above, the goal of the development of intellectual skills, skills of learning is achieved "by means of coaching, exercises, and supervised practice in the operations of reading, writing, speaking and listening, calculating, problem solving, observing, measuring, estimating, and exercising critical judgment." When faculty structure these activities for students, they create a learning environment characterized by active learning, cooperation, and diverse ways of learning and teaching.**

- Three major movements in higher education pedagogy over the past decade are closely tied to achieving the goal of intellectual skills development. These three movements are:
    - Critical thinking
    - Writing across the curriculum
    - Collaborative learning
- Community college chairs can draw on one or more of these three movements to engage faculty in a process to provide input on a variety of instructional strategies, techniques, practices, and activities. While there are generic principles and applications of these three movements, the chair can help the faculty in the division/department to embed the strategies of these movements in the particular discipline.
- Chair-initiated, specific activities:
    - In the context of the department/division meeting, make time on the agenda for a version of the "great teacher workshop" methodology. In the "great teacher workshop," faculty bring an example of an activity which has worked well to stimulate student learning, as well as an example of a specific problem or challenge encountered in teaching. These examples serve as the basis for discussion in the "great teacher workshop;" They can function in the same fashion in the department/division meeting. While this requires some vulnerability and sharing, it has great potential for sharing innovative ideas about teaching.
    - In the context of the division/department meeting or a faculty development day, take the course syllabi of a few courses. Review the goals and objectives of the courses. Typically, the goals and objectives contain both the acquisition of the organized, subject matter knowledge and the development of intellectual skills. After briefly reviewing the goals and objectives, ask faculty to discuss how their students achieve the intellectual skills' goals within the course. Developing intellectual skills, like other skills, requires the creation of active learning skills so that students practice the intellectual skills. Most frequently, this means creating the option for students to be active as writers, speakers, or symbol-makers in manifesting their thinking. This can be broadened to focus on the intellectual skills within the discipline and how students enrolling in the discipline are expected to develop learning skills. The sharing of strategies in this regard can be very invigorating.
    - Devote part of a discipline/division meeting to the discussion of a case study focusing on a teaching problem. This works best when faculty can read a case study and discuss how to solve the problem. This has the benefit of making the specifics less personal than the two items above.
    - Within the division/department set up a small grants process. Faculty within the division/discipline can apply for a small grant to improve teaching and learning. The application should require detail about what will be done and how it will improve teaching and learning. A centerpiece of the small grant process should be the requirement to report back to the division in written and verbal form on the results.
    - Department/division chairs can initiate a teaching improvement specialist process. This involves finding a trusted, discrete faculty member, knowledgeable in the craft of teaching, who can consult with individual faculty on teaching improvement. This person can consult on anything from alternative teaching strategies to the improvement of lectures.

- **Faculty can be encouraged to give a "brown bag lunch" session. In these sessions faculty discuss areas of interest ranging from teaching improvement and academic interests to other, more personal pursuits.**

All six of these activities can be initiated with a relatively small fiscal investment by the institution.

Expanding the Culture of Teaching and Learning Beyond the Division/Department

Chairs can play a role in the community colleges beyond their role with their own division. Expansion of the culture of teaching and learning beyond the division/department throughout the entire institution is essential. In this way the department/division chair can play the role of change agent in fostering teaching and learning in the college.

The simplest way to expand is to organize college-wide faculty development days. Among the topics that work well to foster teaching and learning are these:

- **Great Teacher Workshops**
- **Achieving Intellectual Skills**
- **Case Studies**
- **Writing Across the Curriculum**
- **Critical Thinking**
- **Collaborative Learning**

A more complex, but more effective, way of fostering teaching and learning in the community college is to develop the "learning community" in one of its forms. The community colleges in Washington state are the leaders in this movement where faculty team-teach an interdisciplinary, thematic curriculum and focus jointly on their pedagogy.

Another way of fostering teaching and learning within the community college is for the chairs of two departments/divisions to bring both together to engage in some of these activities listed above.

Constituencies beyond the college can also participate in activities to foster teaching and learning. Chairs can assist in arranging meetings with analogous departments/divisions in neighboring community colleges or other higher education institutions.

Conferences can be mutually planned with other community colleges or other higher education institutions. These can take place during the academic year or during the summer. Once again, the topics listed above provide a good starter list for these meetings.

One additional comment needs to be made about financial incentives relative to fostering teaching and learning. Release time, small grants, and stipends are all ways to promote faculty involvement. Linking quality improvement to evaluation and promotion can be counterproductive. Relatively small fiscal incentives can create a climate of teaching and learning.

Conclusion

Central to the chairs' role in fostering teaching and learning is a belief in the ability of all instructional faculty to improve their strengths and diminish their weaknesses. Teaching well is at the core of the community college mission, and as such, deserves the time and energy of the chair. By developing a set of principles for good undergraduate practice in teaching, it is possible to direct teaching in a meaningful fashion. The best way to understand these principles for good practice is to link them to the goals of community college learning for students--knowledge acquisition, intellectual skills development, and the enlarged understanding of ideas and values.

With these as foundation ideas, the chair needs to create a climate in which faculty can explore their own teaching. In gathering information on how one teaches and on what the other options are, faculty can make decisions about the dimensions of changing their own behavior. The chair needs to assist faculty in providing opportunities for exploration and implementation.

Models exist for facilitating faculty exploration of different pedagogical strategies. One of the most successful methods is to focus faculty on how to teach intellectual skills to students. The critical thinking, writing across the curriculum, and collaborative learning movements provide a rich heritage within which to consider intellectual skills development. There are several formats through which the community college chair can foster teaching and learning within the department/division. Several models exist for collaborating with other faculty beyond the department/division.

While some financial incentives are needed to create better teaching and learning, the innate reward in this activity for faculty is high. Chairs need to devote time and energy to fostering teaching and learning in their role for the institution to invest.

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